

FreeThought

The Largest Circulated Rationalist Monthly

October, 1979

27.11.79
80 Paise

Thought for the Month.....

**"There is no God, no soul, no morality,
no life hereafter, no cycle of birth and death."**

— Jayaprakash Narayan,
in Social and Human Reconstruction.

CONTENTS

"J. P." — The Rebel
—Editorial

India at Cross Roads
—Ms. M. R. Bhatt

In Search of Life's Meaning
—V. N. K. Kumar

Menace of Chain Letters
—Ms. P. Meena Kumari

and other regular features

VOL. IX No. 10

Annual Subscription Rs. 9/-

REASON THINKS: RELIGION DREAMS

Letters.....

Sir,

Recently I received a copy of the magazine FREETHOUGHT from a friend of mine, also a Rationalist who lives in Buffalo (New York). In my opinion it compares favourably with most of the rationalist literature produced locally. Aside from reprint of works by such great writers as Julian Huxley and Bertrand Russell, etc. most of them attack the Christian religion with no particular exposition of the rationalist philosophy.

This is the product of fully justified rebellion against various extreme forms of christianity that flourish here, as well as the more "traditional" sects, but it seems to lack a certain dimension of intellect.

I would like very much to have a subscription to your magazine.

SOLOMON TAIBI,
New York, (U.S.A.)

*

*

*

Sir,

Sometime back I received the August issue of FREETHOUGHT and was glad to see much improvement both in the printing as well as the contents. However, I wish

only one family of types was used throughout the issue, but perhaps the press does not have sufficient quantity of types of one kind. Incidentally, what has happened about the decision to change the name of journal to THE INDIAN RATIONALIST?

—A. SOLOMEN,
Bombay

(The Suggestion is well taken. The clearance from the Registrar of Newspapers is still awaited for the new title. Ed.)

*

*

*

Sir,

Yesterday I received the August issue of FREETHOUGHT. I was about to write to you, as the issue was not received for a long time. I have liked this issue very much. The quality of paper, printing, layout is improved and the material is of good standard.

—Dr. Y. A. RAYAKAR, Shillong

(Due to unavoidable circumstances, FREETHOUGHT issues are getting delayed. Steps have been taken to rectify the situation and readers are requested to bear with us till the end of December 79.—Ed.)

FREETHOUGHT — ANNUAL NUMBER

The December 79 issue of FREETHOUGHT will be brought out as Annual Special Number with more pages, containing many interesting articles which will be of interest to both confirmed Rationalists and believers. Contributors are requested to send articles, poems, and other material for publication in the Special Number by 25th November 1979.

Members and subscribers whose membership fee/subscription is expiring are requested to remit their renewals at once.

—Editor.

Edited & Published by C. A. SESHADRI for Indian Rationalist Association
28/18, Pantheon Road, Madras - 8. and printed at Ambiga Printers, 19, Ayalur Muthia Street, Madras-600 001, Phone: 21163, for Vije Press 2/2, Kalingarayan Street, Madras-14



Published by
Indian Rationalist
Association

28/8 Pantheon Rd,
Madras 600 008

(INDIA)
Editor
C. A. SESHADRI

Freethought

"J. P."—THE REBEL

Jayaprakash Narayan was one of the revered leaders of this country and perhaps the most selfless amongst them during the seventies. Many may recall that J. P. was a heroic figure during the Second World War when he protested to the British that they were using Indian resources "to buttress up imperialism to be converted through the process of war into the chains of the country's slavery". He was imprisoned, but in November 1942 he made a sensational break from the Hazari Bagh Jail, scaling the high walls with ropes. Despite the intensive police and military search, despite the price put on his head, he moved about India in disguise, organizing an underground resistance movement.

Born in 1901, J. P. shared with the other great rationalist nationalist leader, Lala Lajpat Rai, a background of American experience. His eight years in U.S.A. witnessed him as a farm labourer, mechanic, factory worker and student. He became a Marxist and joined the American Communist Party. He returned to India in 1929 bubbling with socialist ideas and hopes.

Nehru requested him to establish the Labour Research Department of the Indian National Congress. In view of his emphasis on the necessity of economic reform and socialism, predictably he had to break with Gandhi. In 1934, the Congress Socialist party was formed (inside the Indian National Congress) with Narayan as the organizing Secretary.

However, in 1949 he changed his course and pleaded for 'democratic socialism',

Editorial Board :

Y. A. Lokhandwala, Bombay
Dr. H. Narasimhaiah, Bangalore
Dr. Y. A. Raikar, Shillong
Dr. J. C. B. Abraham, Madurai
Ms. Margaret Bhatt, Bombay
Dr. Surendra Ajnat, Jullundur
Prof. Raman Pathak, Chikali
V. N. K. Kumar, Bangalore
Ms. S. V. Vasundhra, Madras

Subscription Rates :

Half year Rs 4. 50.
One year : Rs. 9/-

Other countries :

Annual Subscription
By Surface Mail : \$ 4
By Air Mail : \$ 8

NEWS AND NOTES

FIRST GUJARAT RATIONALIST CONFERENCE

An enthusiastic and very well attended meeting of Gujarat Rationalist Association was held on 24-9-79 at Ahmedabad, which

was presided over by eminent Economist Dr. Jitendrabhai Dholakia, M.A., Ph.D., D. Litt.(Prarha) F. R. A. S. (London), Vice President, G. R. A. Mr. Kamalashankar Pandya President, GRA (Ex. president IRA) who could not attend the meeting due to indisposed health, sent an inspiring message from Baroda, Mr. Y. A. Lokhandwala, President, IRA specially came from Bombay to attend the meeting as a Chief Guest. His presence and guidance inspired the members, very much. Mr. Narendra Dave the dynamic General Secretary of GRA and victorious

"J.P."

He revised his estimate of human motivation, stressing the role of the individual as against Government organization and economic legislation. Suddenly he appeared to ignore the poverty, degradation and exploitation the Indian masses were undergoing. The materialist who had in his own words, "worshipped at the shrine of the goddess—Dialectical Materialism—which seemed to be intellectually more satisfying than any other philosophy" started saying that the efforts of remaking and refining human society, 'even the most idealistic and ambitious, such as communism of its original conception, seem, however, to be shipwrecking on one obdurate rock—human baseness'.

Thus in 1954, he retired publicly from party politics. He plumped for the 'Sarvodaya' ideal at the altar of which some of India's keenest intellects and most self-denying men have been sacrificed. He became a moralist and reformer.

He drifted from the life of a rebel to the life of an ordinary democrat and then as a sarvodaya worker only to play into the hands of the privileged classes thus reducing his hold on the people. Systematically he seemed to cut himself off from the masses till he tried half-heartedly to implement his

concept of 'total revolution'. But alas, it is the same old J. P.—hesitant, doubtful and diffident about the methods as well as the goals. Instead of emphasising the negative aspects of the powers-that-be if he had influenced the nation in his chosen path, J. P. would have made a significant contribution.

It is this quality of not asserting himself even when it is a matter of principle that has kept J. P.'s rationalism dormant. The newspapers often gave the impression that J.P. was a religious man, little publicising the fact that he never performed shraddha or pindan even after his wife's demise. It was made sure by our 'freedom-loving' press that, even after his death, his wish that no religious ceremonies should be performed was published under the caption of a prayer meeting on the 13th day.

J. P. is typical of our leaders who would not like to make known their rationalism lest the publicity media (controlled by the rich) and the religious leaders should be offended. The disservice to people is enormous.

However, we, as rationalists, cannot but record our admiration for J. P. who was never power-hungry and for his rationalist leaning. We say, alas, we have lost a leader who was once a rebel.

leader of "Anti-Yagna Campaigns" in Gujarat gave graphic details of various GRA activities in Gujarat for which people's support is growing day by day.

Dr. Jitendra Dholakia, stressed the need for more and more consolidation to further the cause of Rationalism in Gujarat. Mr. Lokhandwala, apprised the meeting about various Rationalist activities in different parts of the country. He heartily congratulated all the activists of GRA for their excellent work in furthering the cause of Rationalism. Eminent Rationalists Prof. Prabhash Sharma, Mr. Navin Shastri, Mr. Harubhai Mehta, Dr. P. R. Shah, youth leader and Mr. Mahendra Patel, spoke at the meeting. Progressive Bohra leaders who are fighting against Sadana, their Religious head, were also present in the meeting. Their cause is very much supported by GRA leaders. The Maharshi Dayananda Revolution Centre and Arya Youth Organisation were also present in the meeting.

In the meeting, it was decided to hold the first GRA Gujarat conference some time in February 80. Mr. A. Moses Narendra Dave and C. K. Balan, General Secretaries of GRA will be the convenors of the conference. A committee of prominent rationalists of Gujarat was also set up. Mr. C. K. Balan proposed a vote of thanks.

—Navin Upadhyaya, Ahmedabad.

NEW OFFICE BEARERS FOR VADODARA RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION

The First General Body Meeting of the Vadodara Rationalist Association was held on September 23, 1979 at Vadodara.

Mr. C. Sadanandan, convenor, after presenting the working report of the Association, welcomed the Chair, Mr. Kamalashankar Pandya, the Chief Guest Mr. Y. A. Lokhandwala, President, IRA, and introduced the distinguished guests to the members.

Mr. Y. A. Lokhandwala, President, IRA in his speech exhorted the members to confront the hoaxes played on gullible people by Astrologers, Miracle men, and such other frauds with courage and conviction of scientific approach.

Dr. J. B. Shah narrated some of his experiences as a Doctor about superstition and its influence in the day to day life.

Ms. Neelaben Chowdhary paid glorious tributes to late Dr. A. T. Kovoov who had devoted his life for inculcating scientific approach in the minds of the people. Mr. Krishna Kurup, in his brief talk said that it is very difficult to forget all the superstitions that is instilled since childhood.

Mr. P. P. Shah talked about the reasons why there is life only on earth. Mr. Kamalashankar Pandya enthused the members by appealing to them not to be discouraged by the numerical strength as against multitudes of people rolling in superstitious beliefs and take their scientific stand against each problem boldly.

The following were elected as the new office bearers of the Association unanimously.

President :

Mr. P. P. Shah

Vice-Presidents :

Dr. J. E. Shah

Mr. D. R. Desai

General Secretary

Mr. C. Sadanandan

Joint Secretary

Mr. M. B. Muralidharan Nair

Treasurer

Ms. Neelaben Chowdhary

Managing Committee Members

Mr. C. Bhaskaran

Mr. Krishna Kurup

Mr. V. Venugopal

Mr. C. Chandran

—C. Sadanandan Baroda

B. E. L. RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION

On 29th July 1979, like-minded persons of B.E.L. met in Cubbon Park and resolved to form an adhoc Committee with the following conveners, for starting BEL Rationalist Association.

1. Mr. C. G. Nagappa
2. Mr. C. Basavaraju
3. Mr. P. Jayagopala Menon
4. Mr. Mahalingam

—V. T. Rajasekhar Shetty,
Bangalore.

RATIONALIST STUDY COURSE AT HYDERABAD

A Rationalist Study Course, the first ever to be conducted at Hyderabad is being organised by the Indian Rationalist Association — on 1st and 2nd December 1979. The course is being arranged at Andhra Vidyalaya College (Phone: 61717) (near Liberty talkies), Domala Guda, Hyderabad-500 029. The Faculty includes eminent rationalists like Dr. H. Narasimhaiah, Mr. Y. A. Lokhandwala, Mr. M. V. Ramamurthy, Dr. J. C. B. Abraham and Mr. Dinesh Nettar. For further details Mr. M. V. Ramamurthy, Vice-President, IRA, 9, M. I. G. H. Colony, Mehdiapatnam, Hyderabad 500 028 (Phone: 31423) may please be contacted.

RATIONALIST MEETING AT NELLORE

A mammoth public meeting was organised at the Town Hall in Nellore under the auspices of Nellore District Unit of APRA on 26-8-'79. The meeting was presided over by Mr. P. Gopalakrishna, Asst. Editor, 'Jameen Raitu.' After Mr. P. Bheemanna, Secretary of the Dist. Unit welcomed the guests and audience, Mr. Ravipudi Venkatadri, President, APRA and Mr. K. Padma Rao, Vice-President, APRA spoke on 'What is Rationalism' and 'Telugu Literature' respectively. The audience were also entertained by Mr. Ganeswaram Babu Rao of

Gurvada with his rationalist songs. The meeting which was attended by more than 1100 people was hailed by both the local people and press as one of the best meetings ever to be held at Nellore.

PUBLIC MEETING AT CHIRALA

A public meeting was held on 23-9-'79 at Chirala in Prakasam Dist. on the subject 'Astrology & Astronomy.' The meeting was presided over by Mr. N. V. Brahman, a well known Radical Humanist. Mr. Brahman during his presidential address proved that Astrology does not stand to reason and hence he appealed to the audience to discard it forthwith. Mr. Ravipudi Venkatadri, President, APRA who was the principal speaker at the meeting spoke at length on the Origin of Astrology, pitfalls in the pseudoscience and how Astrology is altogether different from Astronomy. The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks by Mr. J. Ramaswamy.

GOD'S P.M.'s.

When Mr. Moraji Desai became Prime Minister he declared; 'I never strove for office; God put me here.' When he walked away from the plane crash in which God thought fit to save his life at the cost of five young Air Force officers he again claimed that it was God's hand.

Subsequent political developments make one wonder just what God had in mind. Perhaps his intention was quite different from anything Desai had in mind. For we now have another god-appointed man strutting the national stage in the shape of Mr. Sanjiva Reddy who claims that he also functions on a basis of his god-given conscience. In a news item in 'The Times of India', Mr. Reddy said that when he worshipped Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala recently 'he had prayed that he should be given the courage and the strength to face challenges and act according to the dictates of his conscience.'

He told a large gathering at Tirupati that he was an ordinary villager until 1977 when he was called to politics. "It was his firm conviction that it was Lord Venkateswara who had brought him to his present position."

—Ms. M. R. Bhatta.

PRIEST HELD FOR DUPING WOMAN DEVOTEE

Bombay Sept. 3rd; The chief priest of a temple at Churchgate was arrested by the Bombay police for allegedly duping a woman devotee of Rs. 1.25 lakhs on the pretext of saving her husband's life.

In December 1976 the priest told her he had divined that her husband would die very soon. The woman, stunned at the information, begged him to find a way of saving his life.

The priest agreed to help her if she handed over all her jewellery on which he would have to perform puja. Mrs. Ramchandani then parted with jewellery worth one lakh and Rs. 10,000 in cash.

When Mrs. Ramchandani saw that her husband continued to enjoy good health and had not died, she inquired after the valuables and learnt they had been sold. The priest was arrested.

MUSLIMS DECLARE WAR AGAINST ATHEISM

Srinagar, September 3rd;

The 25th annual session of State Jamaat-Islami yesterday called upon the Muslims of the world, and those in Kashmir in particular, to fight for the reestablishment of the "Rule of Shariat" the world over.

In a resolution adopted on the second day, the party also cautioned Muslims against the "forces of atheism" and urged them to wage a relentless war against them.

The highlight of yesterday's session was a symposium on ways of uniting Muslims. A number of speakers emphasised the urgency of uniting Muslims on the basis of the Law of Shariat.

ON SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

In 1965 Alvin Toffler visualised as to what happens to people when they are overwhelmed by an alarming rate of change. He warned that unless man quickly learns to control the rate of change in his personal affairs, as well as in the society at large, we are doomed to a massive adaptational breakdown. He therefore, advocated the use of future as an intellectual tool for the understanding of personal and public problems.

In this light, it is instructive to note the researches of two German psychiatrists, Prof. Hans Thomae and Prof. Ursula Lehr, who have studied some 200 cases of persons born between 1890 and 1905, in order to discover why people die at different ages. (India Today June 16.30, 1979, p. 63). According to them, those who are still living in that group, had lighter IQs than those who have died. They discovered that the survivors were generally more active, more adaptable and more positive in their approach to life, than those who died. The report concludes that those who stay awake mentally, have a significant longevity advantage.

This goes to support Alvin Toffler and has a lesson for us. The generation gap is day by day getting wider and wider, that the old hardly find any place for themselves in the latest situations. The sad feeling of having become unwanted, must be ultimately having an adverse effect on their will to live. In a basically traditional society where the change is very slow, religionists have more chances of remaining at home all throughout their lives and consequently of living longer. But it seems to me, that so far as adaptability to a fast change is concerned, other things

remaining equal, the humanist rationalists would be in a far better position in future, than the religionists. Situational compulsions would certainly make rationalism the only hope for the future.

— Mukund, Shillong.

EAST GODAVARI DISTRICT RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION INAUGURATED

On 30th September '79, the East Godavari Dist. Unit of Andhra Pradesh Rationalist Association was formed with Mr. N. Rama Rao as its President. Earlier on 29-9-79 and 30-9-79, a Rationalist Study Course was conducted at Mandapet. The course was organised by Mr. S. A. Baksh at Siddhartha Convent. The subjects included 'Rationalism' by Mr. Easwara Prabhu and Humanism: Institution of Society' by Mr. M. V. Ramamurthy. The course was restricted to 50 participants.

RADICAL HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

The National Executive Council of the All India Radical Humanist Association met at Delhi on 16-9-79 under the Presidentship of Mr. V. M. Tarkunde, President of the Association. The council members from various states including A. P. Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Bengal attended the meeting.

Resolutions were passed, inter alia, recognising the imminent need for tolerance among various religions, calling for a Study course at Bangalore in June 80 and requesting the International Humanist and Ethical Union to consent to hold the next International Congress in 1982 in India.

'ANNUAL GENERAL BODY MEETING OF KRA-CANNANORE DIST.'

The Annual General Body meeting of the Cannanore District of the Kerala Rationalist Association was conducted at Rainbow Hall, Cannanore on 12-8-79. District Vice-President Mr. Edathil Balakrishnan presided. District Secretary Mr. Ganga Azhikode presented the report. State Committee members Mr. Narayanan Periya and Mr. M.B.K. participated in the discussions on the manifesto.

The following were elected to the new District Committee:

President

Narayanan Periya

Vice-Presidents

N. C. Sekhar

Edathil Balakrishnan

Secretary

Gangan Azhikode

Joint Secretary

T. P. Padmanabhan

Treasurer

K. P. Kunhikannan

A sum of Rs. 102/- was donated to the welfare fund of late Kodanjeri Lakshmanan, who was an active member of the K. R. A.

—Narayanan Periya
Kerala.

ELOPES WITH SADHU

The Rohtak police is in a dilemma regarding the case of 'kidnapping' of Sarla (28) of Dujana village, which was registered recently at the instance of her parents.

Sarla, a post-graduate, is reported to have eloped with a sadhu named Paramanand, (26) who had been conducting satsang in the area for the last three years.

Sarla is sending registered letters to the police saying that she accompanied the sadhu whom she loves of her own will and it was not a case of kidnapping. She has requested the police not to harass the sadhu, because she would be marrying him soon.

The parents of the girl, along with some village leaders, are pressing the police to recover the girl, saying that she had been kidnapped by the sadhu when she went to Beri, a nearby village, to learn stenography.

—The Indian Express.

Comment: Not surprisingly the Sadhu appropriately named 'Paramanand' must have found mundane—'anand' with the girl! But then he was a small fly before that Rasputin 'Dhirendra Brahmachari. By the by, why hasn't VIKAS thought of making some cheap money—as usual—by publishing Dhirendra's Sexploits?

'NOVEL FINE' AT GURUVAYUR —THE TEMPLE THAT REEKS OF SWEAT

One is really shocked to read an instance (published in a Delhi fortnightly) of the

father of a seven month old baby being fined, for the mere fact that the baby had urinated in the temple at Guruvayur. Fines upto Rs. 3,000/- have reportedly been collected by the authorities under threat on such trivial pretexts

The Guruvayur temple priesthood seems to think that a baby's urine can pollute the precincts. But in their supercilious nature they allow men to worship only with their upper torso unclothed. Any one who'd been to the temple knows that the whole place near the sanctorum, where people stand accluser reeks of sweat!

AQUA CULTURE CHINA'S EXAMPLE

China has become perhaps the largest producer of freshwater fish in the world, according to reports from Western specialists and interviews with Chinese officials.

While accurate figures for total Chinese production are unavailable—estimates run to millions of metric tons—it was evident from a visit to the Pearl River Fisheries Research Institute near Canton that intensive fish culture is indeed being practised and is serving as a model for much of the developing world.

Last autumn 10 American oceanographers visited nine Chinese aquaculture centres and member of the group, Dr. John H. Ryther of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution estimated from what they were told that the national production of freshwater fish in China far exceeded that of any other nation.

—New York Times.

A MALAYSIAN MUSLIM SPEAKS OUT!

Datuk Hussein Onn spoke of several counter productive aspects of Islam propagated by a section of the Muslim community which, he said, could pose serious obstacles to the progress of the community.

The Prime Minister said such an unhealthy state of affairs would have far-reaching implications if immediate steps were not taken to halt it.

He said one particular group exhorted Muslims to concentrate only on the affairs of the next world at the expense of affairs and comforts of this world.

"Muslims in this group deny their children the education facilities provided by the Government and alienate their families from the larger society," he said.

Datuk Hussein said such an attitude was deplorable because it would surely constitute a loss to the community and the nation.

—News from Kuala Lumpur

SWAMI ATTRACTS VIPs

Swami Purnanand, believed to be a tantrik, has been attracting a large number of VIPs in recent months.

The Janata-S chairman, Mr. Raj Narain, was coming from Delhi to visit the tantrik when his plane crashlanded at the unmanned Satna airstrip on Sunday.

Mr. Raj Narain then went to the Swami in a car of the Madhya Pradesh Government before driving to Allahabad.

The Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Banarsi Das, has had at least two visits to Swami Purnanand after he took over the present office, the last being only a week ago.

The swami is also believed to be the guru of Union Finance Minister H. N. Bahuguna and according to reports current during the emergency, the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Gandhi, had removed Mr. Bahuguna from the Chief Ministership of UP because she had reports that Mr. Bahuguna was organising a ritual under the tantrik's supervision for the removal of Mrs. Gandhi from power.

Swami Purnanand runs an ashram near Satna, a district headquarter of M.P.

—The Evening News.

Comment: The Swamy must be having a roaring time now that the Elections are here! We believe the Swamy's henchmen may even have started a holy-ash making plant in the Small Scale Sector!

CARTER THE MISSIONARY

Mr. Carter told an adult Bible class that he tried to convert South Korean President Mr. Park Chung Hee to Christianity. He said that the matter is now in God's hands.

Comment: Now that Mr. Park is no more, Mr. Carter may be praying to save Mr. Parks' 'Soul'!

Readers' Forum

WHY POVERTY?

Sir,

I would like to say how much I enjoy the FREETHOUGHT. We don't read much about what is happening in India here, and your magazine gives us an insight into your country.

I have a friend who believes in gurus. He gave his watch to one who came here and has pictures of Indian gurus all over his walls, especially Sai Baba who looks a very shifty character to me, and I would not trust him with six/pence.

I enclose my booklets—"The Dead Hand of Islam" and "Religion and Madness." I have also written a booklet called 'The Unpleasant personality of Jesus Christ' and compiled 'Anti Christian Writings'.

It seems to me that most of the supposed religious teachers were dangerous lunatics. The only one who I have any respect for, is Buddha, who was at least tolerant, and said 'if my teachings don't work, reject them'.

I have been through India in 1975 and I think that religion is one of the reasons why the country is so poor. People spend all their time praying, and on other religious antics, instead of working.

—Colin Maine, Australia.

AYUDHA POOJA IN I. I. S.

Sir,

Ayudha Pooja is being celebrated in many (perhaps all) Departments of the Indian Institute of Science. The members of the supporting staff (peon, mechanics, sweepers, gardeners) started collecting money for this about a month ago. Sometimes it is difficult to refuse. For instance, when I go to the dispensary for some attention and the attendant there produces his list for collection. Or when I see my son off in his school bus and the driver gets down and produces the list. However I refuse whenever there is no risk of unpleasant consequences. This year I lost Two rupees to the school bus driver. I avoided going to the dispensary at the collection time. Yesterday a student complained that he had given upto Rs. 70 to various groups. I have been suggesting to sympathetic students (mostly research students) to start a poster campaign. Today I put up the handwritten slogans on my office window

myself. "Ayudha pooja is unnecessary-what is necessary is sincere maintenance of machines and installations throughout the year". "Ayudha pooja is out of place here. The Indian Institute of Science is not a Hindu Institute of Science" "Stop extorting money in the name of Ayudha pooja"

I thought of a suggestion for FREETHOUGHT. "Centrefolds" with slogans that can be cut out and displayed-like the centre folds in Filmfare with pinups.

—R. Lakshminarayanan, Bangalore

ASTROLOGY

Sir,

Reference Readers' Forum on page 260 of FREETHOUGHT Sept. 79 issue regarding Astrology. The following news items will be of much interest to your readers:

TIMES OF INDIA, BOMBAY (25-10-75)

"The conference of world renowned physicists and astronomers was held. It was attended by 186 top scientists of whom 18 were nobel prize winners-George Ambel Seurestery declared at the concluding session that "Astrology is no science".

READERS' DIGEST MARCH-1979:

The committee for scientific investigation of claims of the Paranormal to investigate unusual phenomena with open minded scepticism, and to help the public distinguish between fact and fiction was appreciated.

They concluded:

(a) Today even sophisticated people claim to believe in astrology. But it is all a waste.

After centuries, there is still not one repeatable experiment establishing even so much as bare reality of astrology, let alone the finer details.

(b) ESP cannot be demonstrated empirically

(c) The tests of Biorhythms theory proved to be chance expectations.

(d) Einstein said, "Imagination is good. But it must always be critically controlled by the available facts."

—Dr. Rajeev K. Joshi, Bombay.

A SLIP

The write-up "Astrology and Fall of Morarji Desai" published under the feature "Readers Forum" in the September 79 issue was by Mr. Narayana Pariya, Kerala whose name was inadvertently omitted. The slip is regretted.—Ed

A Historical Study of Islam - III

—*Y. A. Lokhandwala*

BOMBAY

NEW EPOCH OF ISLAM

When things grew hotter for Mohammed in Mecca, despite his consistent efforts to convert people there to his new faith of one and only one god Allah, he started thinking of establishing a base elsewhere in Arabia from where he could spread his faith and also work out his strategy to bring the Meccans in line. During the pilgrimage season when people from all over Arabia came to Mecca, he started exploring this possibility by establishing contacts with them. He met six persons from the tribe of Khazraj from Medina, which turned out fruitful.

The Arabs were craving for their own scripture and no religion of foreign origin was acceptable to them. They were looking ahead for some higher form of religion of local origin which could reflect their aspirations and way of life, a religion with scripture which could qualify them to higher culture. Those six Medinese who met Mohammed promised to meet him again in the next pilgrimage season and departed. Negotiations and secret meetings continued for two years. They succeeded in winning over to their side an important tribe of Aws

in Medina. The position in Medina was quite different from that of Mecca. In Mecca and its neighbourhood no agriculture was possible, and, therefore, the existence of Mecca depended on trade and commerce. Whereas Medina was an oasis of 20 square miles or more and gained its livelihood chiefly from growing dates and cereals. Unlike Mecca, Medina was not a compact town, but numerous settlements scattered among the palm-groves and fields. Most of the fertile lands were in the hands of Jews and whatever trade there was, it too was controlled by Jews. This had led to realisation that the Arabs must unite if they wanted to prosper. Hence, they were looking for a neutral leader who could command respect and loyalty of all the rival parties.

In such ripe situation Mohammed arrived in Medina on 24th September, 622. Till that time the Arabs had not developed their calendar. Muslims started counting date from 19th July 622, as it was the day when the Immigration from Mecca to Medina began.

Mohammed was offered a plot of land by the clan of Najjar, whereon, all his companions and he himself too worked to construct a building, which is regarded by Muslims as the first shrine or masjid.

Mohammed had conceded autonomy and freedom to follow their religion to the Jews, emphasising his role as a prophet upholding the essential teachings of earlier prophets of old testament. In order to please Jews and Christians as well, he initially directed his followers to pray in the direction of Jerusalem. Even the fast of Ashura, the Jewish day of atonement, seems to have been observed by the Muslims. However, the Jews never took kindly to him and his efforts to woo them ultimately failed. They broke their agreement and in the twentieth month after migration the Prophet and his followers attacked them. Many verses in the Quran

point out that the Jews never cooperated with the Muslims and their prophet. Hence, Mohammed changed the direction of prayer to Mecca and did not encourage fasting on Ashurs. The fasting in Ramzan, the month in which the battle of Badr was fought, was introduced.

In the month of Ramzan (March 624), a large Meccan Caravan of Merchandise, estimated to carry goods worth 50,000 dinars (gold coins), led by Abu Sufyan, was returning from Gaza to Mecca. Most of the clans of Quresh had their interest in that caravan, which was accompanied by about 40 persons. Mohammed came to know of it and Mohammed badly needed finance to support his immigrant followers as well as to teach a lesson to his enemies in Mecca by raiding that caravan. Abu Sufyan got the wind of it and post-haste sent for armed help, which was rushed in the form of 950 men and lot of arms. Mohammed and his followers numbering about 300, were intercepted at a place called Badr on 17th of Ramzan. There was no discipline in the armed Meccans as they did not come from regular army, which there was none in Mecca. Moreover, the opinion amongst them was divided as to fight against the people of their own tribes which were with Mohammed. On the other hand Mohammed's followers were well-disciplined and they were exhorted by an earlier Quranic revelation. They were also charged with the enthusiasm of the new faith and had strong conviction of their cause. The Muslims attacked the Meccan unbelievers and soon they were in disarray taking to their heels. This victory of few Muslims over so many Meccans gave tremendous boost to Mohammed's prestige and a number of neighbouring Bedouin tribes rallied round him.

Mohammed dealt with hostile and recalcitrant Jewish tribes one by one and finally succeeded in depriving them of the ownership of their fertile land in and around

Medina and reduced them to the status of crop-sharers, by agreeing to give half of their crop every harvest.

The question of the ownership of land is much debated one. Some Muslims maintain that Islam has given a concept of collective ownership of land and there is no place for feudal exploitation in Islam. Mr. Nasir Ahmed Shaikh, a Pakistani theorist, asserts that Mohammed and the Quran were opposed to private ownership of land, at least in so far as it exceeded the scale of a land holding cultivated personally by its owner. Whereas, the chief theoretician of Jamat-e-Islami of Pakistan, Maulana Mausudi, maintains that the private ownership of land is allowed in Islam and it appears that he is right.

Another most controversial issue in recent times is that of prohibition of interest. Some people maintain that it is usury that is banned in Islam, not commercial interest.

In a Quranic verse usury has been prohibited thus, "Allah has permitted trade and forbidden usury. . . . Allah has laid his curse on usury. . . ." The extortionate usury indulged into by the Jews of Medina was causing distress to Muslims who were economically weaker and therefore, Mohammed seems to have banned usury altogether.

(To be continued)

Test for a democrat !

'Every man is born in our country with the belief that whatever exists is bound to be as it is, and God alone can change it. Whoever has this outlook on life, how can he be a democrat, how can he direct the fate of a country of free human beings ?'

—M. N. ROY

In Search of Life's Meaning

—V. N. K. KUMAR

(Implications of Atheistic existentialism to Humanists & Rationalists)

Ask any Beatnik or Playboynik as to what his life means and he will parrot out these words from Arthur Godfrey :

"Helplessly we arrive in this world, add what we can to the general confusion and then depart with equal helplessness. The impression left behind by most of us usually just about equals the hole left in a bucket of water after a clenched fist is withdrawn."

Let alone the escapists and extremists, even among the educated intelligensia a doubt exists as to the real meaning of their lives. It is commonly seen that most people lack the awareness of a meaning worth living for. They are haunted by the experience of their inner emptiness; they are caught in an existential vacuum. There are several factors responsible for this existential vacuum. Let us explore a few of them here.

THE CRITICAL SPIRIT

This destroys traditional assumptions and reveals the insufficiency of simple answers to profound problems like "what is the meaning of my life?". Darwin's origin of species, Oparin's biochemical origin in life and Einstein's oscillating model of the universe have seemingly destroyed traditional faiths, but have not given man a substitute belief system.

MECHANISATION OF LIFE

Man has become assimilated to the machine, and in the process has lost his identity as a person. As a cog in the wheel, he feels powerless and depersonalized. He has merged with the mass in the anonymity of an impersonal organization and values not for himself but only for his contribution to the efficiency of the society.

CULTURAL ABUNDANCE

Our civilization is complex and makes demands that no one can expect to satisfy fully. The limited skills required in earlier societies no longer suffice. Man is exposed to more stimuli and experiences than he can cope with and effectively assimilate. Becoming bewildered, he tries to escape from the unmanageable multiplicity by taking refuge in highly specialized activities and he abandons hope of finding any coherence among the fragments of his experience.

DRASTIC CHANGEFULNESS

Few traditions remain as unchallenged points of reference. Rarely are there settled orders around which a person can organize his hopes and expectations. Change is the only certainty and it diminishes the value given to anything that now exists, in view of the probability that will soon be superseded. The meanings that enrich human life are found in abiding patterns persisting through time and change. It is for this reason that transience of modern life presents such a threat to meaning.

QUEST FOR HAPPINESS

Those who are bent upon the search for pleasure and happiness fail to find them, because of their feverish quest and their very concentration upon them. They fail to recognize the fact that pleasure and happiness are not the goals of our aspirations but the consequences of attaining them. Plea-

sure cannot give meaning to life; if pleasure were the source of meaning, life would have little to offer, since unpleasant sensations out-number pleasant sensations in life.

DEATH & FRUSTRATION

Death is feared because it nullifies the meaning of life and ultimately renders every hope illusory and all striving useless.

EXISTENTIAL HUMANISTS

These have something concrete to offer regarding the meaning of life. They say that the meaning of life is not an abstraction. Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of life is, but rather he must recognize that it is he who is asked. Each man is questioned by life, and he can only respond by being responsible, i.e., the meaning of life is not found by questioning the purpose of existence. It arises from the mundane responses which man makes to life, to the situations and tasks with which life confronts him. Although there are biological, psychological & sociological factors influencing man's responses, there is always an element of freedom of choice. He cannot always control the conditions with which he is confronted but he can control his responses to them. Man is thus responsible, for his responses, his choices, and his actions.

Let us now see how the Existential humanists develop their above argument from fundamentals.

MAN'S NEED FOR RECOGNITION

We want to know in some genuine sense what we belong to and the groups and activities with which we associate. This need is so powerful that if it is frustrated or unfulfilled, severe neurosis can result. This merely socio-psychic need is however out-ranked in power by a need of an even higher order, a meta-psychic need—each one of us wants to know that our existence is justified,

that we are not excess baggage. Religion has supplied some answers but then we have come to realize that the recognition so generously distributed by a supernatural deity is really man-made. We discover that we have simply anthropomorphised a God into a Godman-father and have equipped this ultimate being with the qualities we very much want him to have, most importantly the ability to love us without conditions. But though religion is debunked, man still feels the need for existential recognition. So what does he do? More sophisticated about destiny and possibly more hard-boiled and on guard against fairy tales, modern man has decided to settle for something less. He has shut down his quest for theological recognition and has chosen to seek recognition closer to home, i.e., here in the world of men, in the social institutions where he works. But pathetically it is precisely in modern, corporate human relations and the impersonal organization complex that we become convinced, as never before, that we are indeed replaceable. So gradually modern man comes to recognize that if he wants his existence to be justified, he has to live his life on behalf of certain values. But what should be these values, if they are not religious or social?

This is where we come to the existential dictum 'existence precedes essence' i.e., the fact of our existing is antecedent to any other understanding I may have of the world, including the understanding of my own essence. By way of analogy, in our everyday world of producing and consuming, it is sensible to believe that essence precedes existence i.e., the plan of a chair must be in the carpenter's mind before he builds the chair; the design of the Fiat car must be in the minds of the engineers before the Fiat is actually brought into existence. But where man himself appears to be the 'product' of some higher artificer, the sequence 'essence first, existence second' does not hold, for

whatever design or essence he may assert as being prior to his own existence is necessarily of his own creation. One cannot ask the question: 'what did God have in mind when he created man?', without realizing that any answer must issue from man's own essence-giver. And what is this essence of a being who creates his own essence? This is always an open question, to be answered by every individual in the proceeds of living his life and thereby giving meaning and essence to his existence.

So if man creates his own essence and as seen earlier, he has to live his life on behalf of certain values, he then realizes that he has to create his own values. And his values turn out to be nothing more or less than his choices. To choose is by definition, to set one alternative ahead of another; to choose therefore is by definition an exercise in valuing, an exercise in favouring this over that. But the difficulty is that I never know whether this or that choice is the one I should have made because there are no 'advisers' to justify my choices by ratification. I am ultimately the author of all my choices, and since I can turn to no certifying agency (Religion or social ethics) to finally justify me in my choices, I discover that my choices are without base. They cannot be justified.

Creation of values is thus a very simple business. Every human being can do it - indeed must do it so long as he is awake and choosing. The hard part comes in accepting personal responsibility for the authorship of one's values and specifically, accepting the notion that they are without base but are instead original with one's own life.

If we are all subject to the human condition of essencelessness, people do not differ in their susceptibility to it (we all have it to the same degree) but they rather differ in the degree to which they respond to the conditions authentically i.e., are aware of

their freedom, aware of creating their own values, aware of their baselessness, aware of their unjustifiability, and hence aware of their personal responsibility for the way they are living their lives. Awareness of freedom is thus the main project of every life which hopes to be existential. And this awareness requires us to take on a burden not easily carried. It is the burden of care. To trade numbness for awareness is to feel the intensity of moral involvement in life. It is to feel personally about life, to feel the meaning of personal answerability, to personally care about the increase of good in the world. We are all architects of our own lives and through that life, the creators of values in the world.

VALUES OF EXISTENTIAL HUMANISM

The primary motivation in man is not 'pleasure' or 'power' as the psychologists have told us but 'meaning'. It is this which most deeply inspires man and which is the most human phenomenon of all, since an animal certainly never worries about the meaning of its existence.

We have seen earlier that meaning is discovered by man and man can give meaning to his life by creating values. Man can achieve meaning by realizing three kinds of values. By realizing CREATIVE VALUES in achieving tasks. He can also give meaning to his life by realizing EXPERIENTIAL VALUES, by experiencing the Good, the True and the Beautiful, or by knowing one single human being in all his/her uniqueness; and to experience one human being as unique means to love him/her. Even when these experiences are impossible, a man can still give life a meaning by the way he faces his fate, his distress. Man realizes values by his attitude toward his destined or inescapable suffering. These are ATTITUDINAL VALUES and the possibility for their realization exists until the very last moment of life. So we see that even

suffering has meaning for human beings. We shall now see how the above concepts can usefully be employed in our daily life to make our lives more meaningful.

CREATIVE VALUES

Work : The realization of creative values usually coincides with a person's work, which generally represents the area in which his uniqueness can be seen in relation to society. His work as a contribution to society is the source of the meaning and the value of his uniqueness. It is not the particular occupation upon which fulfilment depends. The job at which one works is not what counts but rather the manner in which one does the work. Neurotics who complain that a different occupation would offer fulfilment must be shown this. It is not the occupation itself, but the expression of the person's uniqueness and singularity in the work or beyond the required duties, which gives meaning to the occupation.

Freedom & Responsibility : Freedom means freedom in the face of three things: the instincts, the inherited disposition and environment. Although man is influenced by all of these, he still has freedom to accept or reject and to make decisions. While he is not free from conditions, he is free to take a stand toward these conditions. Man thus does not simply exist, he decides what his existence will be. Man's freedom is not 'from' but freedom 'to do' something and this is his responsibility. Man is responsible to himself and to his conscience for his actions and for his life. Thus he will be able to say "If I am happy and successful then it is essentially not fate and luck but my own efforts and decisions that have led to my well-being; if I fail and am unhappy, then I am prepared to assume full responsibility for my problems".

EXPERIENTIAL VALUES

Love : An existential humanist is capable of loving as an adult. He does not use love

neurotically. In love he accepts the dignity and the needs of his partner. He gets more pleasure in giving rather than in receiving.

Appreciation of Arts & Nature : Whether in fine arts or performing arts, in appreciating the creative works of painters, musicians, actors, poets, dancers, sculptors and the like, we can fill up our lives with meaning. And then haven't many of us reached ecstasy in viewing a beautiful sunset!

ATTITUDINAL VALUES

Pain : Pain is unavoidable and evil is an integral part of life. Human life can be fulfilled not only in creating and enjoying but also in suffering. The destiny a person suffers is to be shaped where possible, and to be endured where necessary. Only when man no longer has any possibility of actualizing or realizing creative values—when there is really no means at hand for shaping fate, then is the time for attitudinal values to be actualized.

DEATH

People who deny that death puts an end to human life by taking easy recourse to religion usually find their lives empty and meaningless, though they may not admit the fact. This is because these people can postpone decisions and they are in no hurry to live, since the soul, in their belief, is external and the earthly existence is not the end-all and be-all of life. These persons either look back or look forward and in the process the present slips by. If one does not give attention and direction to the present, it is obvious that tomorrow, when we look on the present, we find it empty and meaningless. Those who accept the finiteness of life, live each day as if it were their last and obviously can take action to make their each day meaningful.

An existentialist will be able to say, "I will adapt myself to frustrations. I know

that much of the time, I cannot have what I want. I know that over a lifetime I will be forced to give up many of my most cherished dreams. I am successful in accepting that which cannot be helped. I can accept the fact that all life ends in death and nothingness."

Such people are not terrified at the thought of their own deaths. As though having lived fully, they do not long for perpetual existence on earth. It is as if each period were lived fully at the time and no needs remained to haunt them. The feeling can be compared to consuming the various courses of a large meal after one has eaten soup, he loses his taste for soup and wants something else. If one has had a satisfactory childhood, a successful career, a good marriage, and a family that is grown and independent, the pleasures of life have been experienced and there is not much more that a person could ask for in life. They also are aware of a kind of biological immortality in the sense that a person lives on through his sons and daughters and their sons and daughters, in an endless chain. In addition to generational continuity, the person lives on in his progeny, as the reproductive cells are passed on from parent to child. There is again a kind of creative immortality brought about through one's teaching, art-making, construction, writing, healing, inventing or through lasting influences of any kind on other humans—influences that one feels can enter into a general human flow beyond the self.

Existentialists know that death does not render life meaningless; rather the temporality of life gives it meaningfulness. If life were not finite, everything could be postponed; there would be no need for action, choice or decisions, and thus no responsibility. The meaning of human existence is based on its irreversible character.

We sometimes fail to realize that death and the dread attending it, is the means by which the true exultation of being human can be realized. The encounter with nothingness is in fact the test we should be willing to take as a demonstration of our worth in the world. Man is the being to whom the privilege has been given of testing whether he can live with the haunt of nothingness in the very act of his existing. Man is not more than the beast because he dies, but because he knows, and can live with the knowledge that he is 'fastened to a dying animal'. I think there is no test which can outrank this as a device for summoning the very finest and best from each man. As Tillich says, the test calls forth 'the courage to be'.

And what is the magnitude of this courage? It is such that we are asked to face up to nothingness without flinching, to make the encounter with nothingness as a military General 'engages opposing forces' and to advance against nothingness with the assertions and affirmations of one's own being. In other words, the project is to live in such a way as to be deserving of something better than nothingness and obliteration; to confront nothingness, to deny nothingness, by filling it up with a life that ought never to be lost or destroyed. In conclusion let us see what the Late Bertrand Russell had to say regarding the meaning of life:

"I do not think that life in general has any purpose. It just happened. But human beings have purposes. Neither the falsehood of theology nor the finality of death deprive our lives of whatever riches they may contain. I believe that when I die, I shall rot, and nothing of my ego will survive but I should scorn to shiver with terror at the thought of annihilation. Happiness is nonetheless true happiness because it must come to an end, nor do thought and love lose their value because they are not everlasting."

When Russell spoke of love, it is obviously existential love that he had in mind. There are people who in loving others and being good to others, treat other persons not as ends in themselves but as means only—to the end of their own salvation, or to the end of the glorification of God himself. For such people the existence of God is a necessary motive for loving others.

An existential humanist would say that if God existed and was a moral being he would not want such a glorification. There are three possibilities about God. Either

- (1) He does not exist; in which case nothing is altered. The facts and problems of nature and human nature remain exactly the same, as do our values based upon human experience; or
- (2) He does exist; and the values He lays down are in accordance with those we find good in our human experience; in which case his existence makes no difference to our morality; or
- (3) He does exist; and His moral rules are not those we find good in our human experience (e.g., he might hold that he had created people with differently coloured skins on a scale of superiority and inferiority, and that the darker should be made use of by the lighter), and in this case we should have no option but to disagree with him; indeed, to disobey him.

In all cases, then, God is superfluous for human morality. The values and ethical rules are not in any way weakened because you have no belief in, or have doubts about any 'ultimate authority' such as God.

In the words of Jean Paul Sartre, "Existentialism isn't so atheistic that it wears itself out showing that God doesn't exist. Rather it declares that even if God did exist, that would change nothing. Not that we believe that God exists, but we think that the problem of his existence is not the issue."

Existential love is a concern for the growth and happiness of the other person, as an end in itself. Such is the conclusion we come to.

And talking of happiness, we see that it comes as a package deal—a mixed blessing. Happiness is a baby's softness and laughter forgetting the wet diaper; happiness is a picnic forgetting the ants; happiness is a beautiful woman forgetting her projecting teeth; happiness is parenthood forgetting the labour pains. Happiness is often considered the logical opposite of grief or pain. Physical or mental suffering is part of human existence and to experience them is unavoidable. To spare oneself from grief at all costs can be achieved only at the price of total detachment, which excludes the ability to experience happiness as well. The opposite of happiness thus is not grief or pain but depression which results from inner sterility and unproductiveness.

A concentration on perpetual happiness makes it all more elusive to attain. Only by realizing creative and experiential values and when that is not possible, by taking the proper attitudes toward suffering can we inject meaning into our lives. Put in the shape of a formula.

$$\text{HAPPINESS} = \frac{\text{Motivation to create \& realize values}}{\text{Expectation of recognition \& rewards}}$$

The greater the numerator and lesser the denominator in the above fraction, the greater the happiness.

A friend once said to the distinguished Roman Statesman and Philosopher Cato the elder, "It is a scandal that no statue has been erected to you in Rome! I am going to form a committee." "No", said Cato, "I would rather have people ask 'why isn't there a statue to Cato?' than 'why is there one?'"

One could console oneself for missed recognitions in the above manner but then an existential humanist not only has no expectations of recognition from others but as the creator of his own values and feeling responsible for his state of mind, gives himself the necessary recognition.

Thus we come to the realization that happiness, an exalted state of the mind, comes to us as a by product of a meaningful life devoted to value creation and realization,

* * *

India at the Crossroads

by

MARGARET BHATTY

The Prime Minister of India, addressing the 22nd meeting of the Committee for Space Research held in Bangalore recently, said space travel is nothing new to Indians. In a report in "The Times of India" covering the occasion he is quoted as saying that he himself had met one or two men who could fly through space. They had told him it was not difficult if one could remove body weight. That was where the secret lay.

This is not the 1st time Desai has claimed such a distinction for Indians, acquired through a divine knowledge of the siddhis. To his regret it is always dismissed by skeptics as mere myth. However, in India scriptural support of the most absurd claim turns it into an irrefutable argument. None of the space scientists present thought it proper to make a suitable reply.

When the Janata assumed government under Morarji Desai with the ominous words: "I never strove for office. God put me here," we had the astonishing spectacle of a Health Minister and a Prime Minister advocating Hindu brahmacharya as the only effective solution to the population problem. This is one area where we now have no margin left for error, but they succeeded in bringing the entire population control program to a grinding halt.

Recently, the Union Minister for Education opened an Institute for Astro-

logy in Calcutta. This is another science which incorrigible skeptics also dismiss as superstition.

Under the pious patronage of such leaders it is hardly surprising that obscurantist bigotry is beginning to taint our thinking and erode scientific values. To cite one such example: In the May number of the magazine "India Today" a story was published under the title "Reincarnation. body and Soul."

It told of "startling data" uncovered by a team of "researchers", Dr. Satwant Pasricha and Dr. (Mrs) Vinobha Murthy, at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences in Bangalore. Over a period of three years they claim to have detected 80 cases of "reincarnation" chiefly among children.

One of their subjects is a 6 year-old Brahmin girl who shocked her highcaste parents when she "suddenly erupted one day with a recipe for a non-vegetarian dish." Furthermore, she then began cleaning lavatories like a grown-up woman and covered her mouth as if with a veil, said the report. She claimed she was not their child, but somebody else who had once lived at another address.

Predictably, when the "researchers" inquired at this address, they found that

a woman of that name had lived there once, but she had died several years before when run over by a train.

Some of the other "data" turned up by these "scientists" without a doubt validates the Hindu concept of karma. The researchers claim that while the rebirth cycle "follows no definite pattern", the majority occur in Hindu families, with very few in Muslim or Christian ones, since they do not believe in reincarnation. Sex is interchangeable. Also, their findings confirm the popular belief that a violent death appears to be the "precursor of reincarnation." This gives the phenomenon regional significance. Since violent deaths are more prevalent in U.P. Rajasthan and M.P., Mrs Murthy claims that most of the 80 cases were found in these areas. This incredible news story is published in "India Today" under its SCIENCE section!

When the Prime Minister and the Education Minister declare there is an urgent need to reform our educational system to bring it into line with "our ancient cultural heritage", will levitation, astrology and reincarnation fall within the scope of science teaching in the classroom?

It seems that the last remaining semblance of rationality left us by British liberal tradition and Western scientific thought is now being replaced by a mindless investigation of ancient superstition. When people support their arguments from scripture it is a simple matter to choose

only those passages as the truth which suit their purpose. This is what always happens when public debate again flares up as to whether or not the ancient Aryans ate beef. Such a minor historical detail should have no relevance to modern agricultural planning. But it continues to bedevil our planners. With its support obscurantist obsessions are being transformed into national policies.

Age in India is equated with immense wisdom. Any leader who lives too long can lay claim to eminence, though he might have no other merit to commend him. When earlier this year, Vinoba Bhave, the spent saint, declared he would go on a fast unto death on behalf of the cow, the country was thrown into turmoil.

Countless ministers made the "new pilgrimage" to his ashram to plead and supplicate. None had the courage to denounce the irrational stupidity of his action. V.S. Naipaul in India: **A Wounded Civilization**, has very aptly called Bhave "the mascot who swallowed his Mahatma." And indeed for a few tense weeks an obstinate old man was able to hold the whole nation to ransom in the name of a dubious legacy left us by his guru, Mohandas Gandhi.

"Moral indignation corrupts the agent who possesses it, wrote Herbert Butterfield, "and is not calculated to reform the man who is the object of it. It is really a demand for an illegitimate form of power." Bhave has always been morally indignant.

"A fast unto death is like a nuclear bomb, a powerful weapon, but not to be used," wrote one editor at the time. A laughable statement on the face of it. There is no scientific evidence that keeping the alimentary canal clear from end to end generates any kind of power equal even to a mini-bomb. But Bhaye's fast would have easily produced that kind of repercussion in the enslaved minds of Indians, and probably pushed the nation to the brink of a communal holocaust.

The quotation is taken from an editorial penned by a supposedly rational writer, M.V. Kamath of "The Illustrated Weekly," who might have known better. Be it said to his credit he also urged that like the nuclear bomb the hunger-strike should never be used by "men of standing in society." His reason? Because we cannot afford to lose good leaders in such manner! An answer to that is that we surely do not need men of such puerile mind and could well afford to lose them. It is our own irrational thinking that raises them to eminence when they resort to starvation to tyrannise others and get their way. Gandhi the obsessed, is now himself become an obsession to his countrymen.

From midnight of August 15th 1947, when an anachronistic Anglo-Saxon parliamentary system was inaugurated under the favourable conjunctions of Indian astrological signs, obscurantist rituals and the belief in magic has persisted in government at the national and state level. But these were confined to the personal idiosyncrasies of individual ministers. Never before have they taken precedence over commonsense and wisdom as within these last two years of Janata rule.

We now increasingly see the revival of Hindu fundamentalist attitudes dictating national policies. Elected representatives of the people see themselves in the role of self-styled saviours with scriptural sanctions to ministerial portfolios. And leading them all is the man God put there—Morarji Desai.

Prem Nath Bazaz in his book *Secular Morality* says the present moral dilemma we face is because "the gloss of rationality" which the Indian character acquired during the 150 years of British rule has now completely worn off in the last thirty years of Independence.

The grafting of modern institutions to archaic and outmoded concepts cannot lead to progress. "No society has flourished which shaped itself on immutable religious belief." Christianity in Europe saw this out in that period of its history which we now call the Dark Ages.

"Nothing could better demonstrate the gravity of the moral crisis in India than the fact that most of its scientists are religious-minded and have faith in the karma theory and numberless Vedic and Puranic idols. At least a number of them believe in astrology, go to worship the idols at famous temples, and are devotees of obscurantist avatars (incarnations of God)," writes Prem Nath Bazaz.

And again: "The worst type of hypocrites in Indian society today are the men endowed with scientific knowledge who cherish superstitions as true facts because they are age-old and time-honoured."

This criterion of ancient-ness is repeatedly stressed by Indian leaders, as if Time in itself transmutes magically. It is in this confirmed belief, as Naipaul put it, that "India blindly swallows its past."

Significantly, the Freedom Movement had religious overtones. The mass appeal Gandhi made was an appeal to an antiquated Hindu mentality. It appeared to his followers as a kind of reawakening after foreign suppression with its talk of Ram Rajya, ahimsa and his own elevation to Mahatma-ship. Within such a context Partition seemed inevitable. Politics under Gandhi's influence became semi-religious. Under our present leaders they are blatantly religious.

The simplistic attitude of trying to face both ways, forward into the twentieth century, and backwards into an unproved mythical past, places India in a peculiar

dilemma. Can a nation hope to survive on such a futile mix of the rational and the irrational? What is the future of the scientific spirit when a prime minister can confidently assert before an assembly of space scientists that Indians have always known how to fly by rendering themselves weightless? Or when he advises the T.B. Association of India to propagate the use of urine therapy for curing the disease?

Prem Nath Bazaz sees India today at the crossroads of her history.

"The ambivalence of her leaders threatens her progress with two powerful forces pulling in different directions," he writes. "The country can either take the path of modernity, of science and technology, of reason and secularism; or it can look backward to restore the ancient age of the Vedas and Puranas. Nothing but destruction awaits India in the latter case."

MARRIAGE

Marriage — a degradation for women to love and obey a man — all too primitive and barbaric for words.

— P. B. Shelley,

The renowned Poet-atheist.

PRINCELY FEARS

Surely what we should be worried about now is whether people are going to become atheists; whether they are going to be given an idea of what is right and wrong.

— Prince Charles

From an address to the Salvation Army.

INDIAN GODS TO HELP NEW YORK CITY

A 1 Million Hindu temple was built recently in Flushing, New York by a group of Indians with liberal assistance from the Tirupati Tirumala Devasthanam and the Government of Andhra Pradesh.

The Mayor of New York, Mr. Edward I. Koch participated in the Deepavali festival observance and pooja and offered prayers at the Ganesa and Mahalakshmi shrines for the improvement of the city and its finances.

— 'The Hindu'

Comment : Let us hope the Councillor would soon move a resolution to replace the renowned Statue of Liberty in his own city by a statue of Goddess Lakshmi who can shower yankee dollars!

The Menace of Chain Letters !

Ms. D. Moenakumari, Madurai

Chain letters are the unwelcome guests nowadays. The rate of getting such letters has increased a lot now. Within the past two months, I received four letters. Each letter begins with, 'It is coming from Lord.....' and runs like this: 'you have to send twenty five copies of this letter. If you do so you will get a fortune and if you don't, you have to lose your property or life'. Those who are thinking rationally do not bother about such threatening letters. But the people having faith in God are cruelly affected. How many among the god-lovers obey such letters piously and sincerely? Some may lose their peace of mind and be in a dilemma whether to obey or not. Those who don't mind the expense may dutifully write such letters. But the poor having faith in God are the most affected because of such letters. We'll see the consequence of such a letter on a poor girl.

A TRUE CASE

Nalini belonged to a poor family. She was studying for the B.Sc. degree on a

scholarship. Adding to the financial strain of the family, her father became a throat-cancer patient. Doctors predicted that he may not live for more than 2-3 weeks. Two weeks later the family members were expecting imminent tragedy with agony and fear. Nalini was then in study holidays, preparing for the exams. But the letter which came that day frustrated her. It was a chain letter informing that it was coming from the Lord of Tirupathi and if she did not send out twenty five copies of it there would be a great loss for her. Since Nalini had belief in God she could not ignore that letter. If she had to write twenty five letters she had to spend about Rs. 7. 50. Because of the expenses on her father's illness the family had suffered a lot and she couldn't afford to send out the chain letters. In this situation where would she go for money? After being on the horns of dilemma for one whole day, she dropped the idea of writing those letters. But she had lost her peace and had been worrying about her father. After three days, her father died peacefully but Nalini took it that because of her dereliction in circulating the letters her father died. She didn't cry, didn't talk to anyone and became mentally deranged. could not concentrate on her studies and because of the confused state of mind she failed in her examinations.

A COSTLY COINCIDENCE

Her father, a seriously affected cancer patient, who had been counting the days, would have died anyway. His death after the arrival of the letter was a mere coincidence. If her father died before that letter's arrival Nalini would have

consoled herself and would have prepared for the exams. There would be no deception or insincerity on her part. If god really existed he would have known that she had the will to write but her problem was money and would have given better judgement. But what judgement did she get? she became psychopathic and failed in her exams. It seemed as if God was taking vengeance against the poor girl who could not obey him.

MISUSED SOUVENIRS

In certain colleges, all the outgoing students will be given a souvenir containing the addresses of all the co-students. It is meant for giving the students a chance of making contact with their co-students when they want. But some of us have detected that a few college students are misusing such souvenirs by writing chain letters to their co-students. It is very unpleasant to know that well-educated students are also resorting to such practices.

Ultimately, even if we grant that God exists how can we believe in this twentieth century that God is writing a letter demanding that innumerable letters be written in praise of him? How foolish it would be to insist on anyone to spend money for writing not one or two but twenty fifty letters! So at least the educated students (even among those having faith in God) must think rationally and ignore such portentous letters. Though we cannot stop it completely at least if the students do not respond to such threatening letters its circulation would be cut off and people weaned away from such stuff.

What are you talking, Mr. Reddy?

"It is a matter of gratification that our women achieved equality of status..... Legally, no doubt, they have complete equality with men....."

—Mr. N. SANJIVA REDDY

(Address to the Asian & Pacific Regional Conference of the U. N. Decade for Women)

Comment: Have you forgotten the Islamic Personal Laws, Mr. Reddy? What is all this nonsense about 'Legal Equality'?

Break your Shackles!

Chastity!

The magic word that ensnared you!

Be the husband unfaithful

A drunk, a gambler

But you 'had' to serve him

as your 'God'!

The Shastras proved to be
your Shackles!

Break them and come away

O Lady of the House

Your battle will hence forth be fought

By men of 'Free thought'

In the streets!

Break your shackles and come away

Give them a hand!

—MR. L. K. SASTRY,
Anakapalle (A. P.)

THE WORST ZAMINDAR!

According to the Smritis, (law-codes), the law giver Narada, allowed only one-tenth of the grain produced as wages for his toil to the agricultural labourer. However, in the case of Buddhist Monastic lands as much as five-sixth of the produce was paid to the labourers.

Book-Review

Church and Religion
in the USSR

by Vladimir Kuroyedov
Novosti Press, Moscow 1977

—R. Lakshminarayanan, Bangalore

In contrast to the book 'God and the Soviets' by Constantin de Grunwald, which I reviewed in *FREETHOUGHT*, June 1979, the present book is by a spokesman of the Soviet Government. Vladimir KUROYEDOV is Chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs under the USSR Council of Ministers. Constantin de GRUNWALD, one may recall, was a Russian 'emigre' settled in France. While 'God and the Soviets' documents with a mixture of admiration and disapproval the efforts of the Soviet government to roll back the influence of religion and to spread atheism, the government spokesman highlights the 'implementation of the principle of freedom of conscience'. It is obviously a reply to the hostile Western criticism that there is no religious freedom in Russia.

From KUROYEDOV's account of the historical development of the attitude of the Soviet State to religion and the church, it seems that, while in the early years after the October Revolution the Government set about freeing the citizens from the clutches of religion, it now sees itself obliged to protect the legitimate rights of believers, religious associations and ministers/priests.

In 1918, the Council of Peoples' Commissars adopted a decree on "the Separation of the Church from the State and of the School from the Church". This decree made it possible for Soviet citizens to profess any religion or none at all. In Tsarist Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church was the dominant, official religion. "It was part of the state apparatus and

exerted a tremendous influence on people's lives and on political and social life in general. High government posts could be held only by persons professing the Orthodox faith." The decree forbade the Church to punish parishioners for apostasy or to convert people by force (Article 11).

In Tsarist Russia the Church controlled education with special zeal. "Almost one half of all schools were directly in the hands of the Synod, and their principal task was to instill in the children fear of God, love for the Church and devotion to the Tsar and the Fatherland. Religion was a compulsory subject in all educational establishments and the principal one in primary and parish schools." The October Revolution changed all that. The decree on "the separation of the School from the Church" meant that the Church would not be permitted to interfere in the education of the younger generation and pupils would not be forced to study religion. As Marx pointed out, the removal of the religious and the clerical element from education is the beginning of the mental emancipation of the people. Article 124 of the decree reads: "The Church in the USSR shall be separated from the State and the school from the Church to ensure freedom of conscience for all citizens. Freedom of religious worship and of *anti-religious propaganda* shall be recognized for all citizens."

57 years later, in 1975, the Presidium of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet adopts a decree "on Religious Associations" which has special provisions "to authorize religious centres and diocesan administrations to manufacture religious articles and objects of worship and to sell them to religious associations. All religious associations at both central and local level were authorized to acquire means of transportation and to rent, build or purchase premises for their needs." The new legislation also makes it "an offence to interfere with the performance of religious rites when they do not disturb public order and do not encroach on the

rights of citizens. Any discrimination of believers or infringement of their freedom of conscience is strictly prohibited. A decision of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation of March 1966 and similar rulings in other Union Republics make it explicit that refusal to employ a person or to admit him to an educational establishment, dismissal from work or an educational institution, or deprivation of legitimate benefits and privileges, or any other limitations of citizens' rights on religious grounds are punishable by law."

"To illustrate, in a recent case in the city of Alma Ata, a woman manager of a furniture-design office, by the name of Makaryeva, attempted to dismiss an accounts worker who had been baptized, under the pretext of staff reduction. The believer appealed to the local Soviet of Working People's Deputies. Her rights were upheld, while Makaryeva lost her position and had to answer in court to a criminal charge."

If all this smacks of "revisionism", the answer is that, once the political power of religious groups is broken, by removing the right to own real estate and subjecting religious activity to certain regulations, in particular by prohibiting fraudulent practices, the State can afford to take a paternalistic attitude and give back certain concessions to genuine religious urges—even if they are delusions—just from humanistic considerations. While we atheists may hate the institutional monsters, the Sai Babas and the Sankaracharyas, the true, deluded, believers deserve sympathy.

The Soviet spokesman attributes the decline of religion in the USSR to a natural process, not peculiar to socialist countries alone. That is, the decline in religion is due to the "inexorable progress of history"....."Religion and the Church are undergoing a deep ideological crisis all over the world. The Vienna newspaper Neue Kronen-Zeitung reported that in Austria 24,174 people had broken away from

officially recognized churches during 1974, of whom 20,816 were from the Roman Catholic Church...The Polish newspaper Zycie Oarszawy reported that each year the number of Catholic priests throughout the world is reduced by 2000 and that in the last seven years 14000 priests had returned to secular life."....."In view of the radical social changes that have been effected in our country it is not surprising that the decline of religion has been much more marked in the USSR than in other countries."

While Kuroyedov is perhaps a bit too defensive and apologetic in trying to show that freedom of conscience is guaranteed in the USSR (which is a reaction to the hostile anti-communist propaganda), he does point out that religious activity is subject to certain legal prohibitions: 'Legislative acts prohibit: the use of believers' meetings for making political statements against the interests of the Soviet State; the incitement of believers to evade the fulfilment of their civic duties and not to participate in social and political life; the performance of cruel rites which are harmful to the health of citizens and *frauds perpetrated with the object of playing on superstition* (such as spreading rumours about "the end of the world" and of "miraculous healings" or "happenings" at so-called "holy places", staging such "healings", etc.) Religious bodies are not entitled to make contributions from believers compulsory."

Western propaganda makes "martyrs" out of criminals who violate Soviet legislation. The few case-histories given by Kuroyedov show that there are a few cranks and careerists in the USSR not very different from our Sai Babas. But the Soviet Union has legislation to deal with them and the law-breakers are dealt with suitably. Soviet legislation on religious matters prohibits any charitable activity by the Church.

The highly informative book is an interesting and welcome addition to the books on the place of Religion in USSR.

AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND AN APPEAL

We gratefully acknowledge the following donations for **FREETHOUGHT** received from June '79 to September '79:

Mr. Jayes, Coimbatore	...	10 00
Mr. P. V. Prakash, Madras	...	10 00
Mr. C. A. Seshadri, Madras	...	200 00
Mr. P. Manoharan	...	5 50
Mr. M. Sridhar Babu, Kolar	...	15 00
Mr. E. Prasada Rao, Sri Kalahasthi	...	9 50
Dr. K. V. N. Sarma, Trinidad	...	6 00
Mr. Raghuvir Kodial, Mangalore	...	32 00
Ms. Iris Ramanathan, Madras	...	25 00
Mr. J. N. Sathu, Srinagar	...	32 00
Ms. R. Sudha, Malaysia	...	6 65
Mr. P. K. Narayanan, Bangalore	...	10 00
Less than Rs. 5/- each	...	10 75
		372 40
As per July '79 issue	...	341 25
		713 65

Readers might have noticed that since August '79, **FREETHOUGHT** is getting badly delayed. While other unavoidable reasons are also contributing for these delays, one of the main bottlenecks is the tight financial position. All members and other well wishers are requested to rush their donations so that the position can be rectified at the earliest and atleast from January '79 issue onwards the journal can be mailed on the first of the month itself.

Ms. S. V. VASUNDHRA, Treasurer, I.R.A.

ANOTHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Consequent on the increase in the rate of Life Membership Fee of the Association from Rs. 100/- to Rs. 200/- with effect from October 1978, some of the Life Members who enrolled before the date of increases were generous enough to help the Association by remitting the difference of Rs. 100/-. Since the increase was not given any sort of retrospective effect their dedication to the cause of rationalism is laudable. Their remittances are gratefully acknowledged hereunder :

<i>Membership No.</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Place</i>
LM-35	Mr. P. Bheemanna, M.A., M.Ed.,	Nellore, (A.P.)
LM-36	Dr. Y. A. Raikar,	Shillong (Arunachal Pradesh)

This is in addition to the names which have already been acknowledged in June '79 issue of **FREETHOUGHT**.

It is hoped that other Life Members would also voluntarily come forward to help their Association financially.

Ms. S. V. VASUNDHRA, Treasurer, I.R.A.

SUBSCRIBE * READ *** AND PASS ON
RATIONALIST JOURNALS IN INDIAN LANGUAGES**

MALAYALAM

YUKTHIVADI

(Monthly)

Editor: UNNI KAKKANAT

Single Copy: 75 ps.

Subscription: Rs. 9/- p.a.

Address: Irinjalakkuda 680 121
Kerala.

YUKTHI PRABHA

(Weekly)

Editor: VARGHESE KORATTY

Single Copy: 80 ps.

Subscription: Rs. 40/- p.a.

Address: R. S. Road,
Trichur 680 001 Kerala.

YUKTHI VICHARAM

(Monthly)

Editor: KRISHNANKUTTY NAIR

Single Copy: Re. 1/-

Subscription: Rs. 12/- p.a.

Address: Nasthikam, Kuttippuzha Nagar,
Trichur 680 004
Kerala.

TAMIL

ARIVU VAZHI

(Monthly)

Editor: K. PANCHAKSHARAM

Single Copy: 50 ps.

Subscription: Rs. 6/- p.a.

Address: 8, Perumal Lane,
Arumbakkam, Madras-29

ARIVIYAKKAM

(Monthly)

Editor: S. NATHIGA NANDANAR

Single Copy: 50 ps.

Subscription: Rs. 5/- p.a.

Address: Ariviyakka Peravai
G. S. T. Road, Vandalur,
Madras 600 048

SINTHANAYALAN

(Weekly)

Editor: V. ANAIMUTHU

Single Copy: 40 ps.

Subscription: Rs. 20/- p.a.

Address: Periyar Publications,
Trichur 620 002

TELUGU

CHARVAKA

(Monthly)

Editor: T. R.

Single Copy: 80 ps.

Subscription: Rs. 9/- p.a.

Address: CHARVAKA,
Vijayawada-10

VIKASAM

(Monthly)

Editor: M. V. RAMAMURTHY

Single Copy: Re. 1

Subscription: Rs. 12/- p.a.

Address: 9, MIGH Colony,
Mehdipatnam,
Hyderabad.

HINDI

BHEEM PATRIKA

(Fortnightly)

Editor: L. R. BALLEE

Subscription: Rs. 10/- p.a.

Address: BC-IH, DDA Estate, Munjika, New Delhi 110 067